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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY L, 21ST INFANTRY  
(24TH INFANTRY DIVISION) SOUTH OF PINAMPOAN,  
(BREAKNECK RIDGE) LEYTE ISLAND, P. I., 5-15 NOVEMBER 1944  
(LEYTE CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

 Type of Operation described: INFANTRY RIFLE COMPANY ATTACKING  
AS PART OF AN INFANTRY REGIMENT IN A MEETING ENGAGEMENT

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO. 2

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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY L, 21ST INFANTRY  
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company L, 21st Infantry, 24th U.S. Infantry Division in a series of meeting engagements to occupy "BREAKNECK RIDGE," LEYTE ISLAND, 5-15 November 1944, during the liberation of the PHILIPPINES.

To orient the reader, let us summarize briefly the major events leading up to this action.

During April 1944, the 24th Infantry Division, part of I Corps U.S. Sixth Army, was surprisingly successful in seizing HOLLANDIA on the northern coast of NEW GUINEA. (1)

By October 1944, Sixth Army had control of WESTERN NEW BRITAIN, the ADMIRALTIES, and had completed operations on the north coast of NEW GUINEA, to include securing the southeast portion of MOROTAI in the HALMAHERAS, and was enroute to the PHILIPPINES to begin liberation. (See Map A) (2)

The LEYTE OPERATION was undertaken to secure naval, air and supply bases from which to provide support for future PHILIPPINE campaigns. The operation was divided into three tactical phases. The first phase was to secure the entrances into LEYTE GULF. This was accomplished by the 6th Ranger Battalion in occupying DINAGAT, HOMONHON and SULUAN ISLANDS during 17-19 October 1944. (See Map B) (3)

- (1) A-5, p. 10
- (2) A-17, p. 457-459
- (3) A-20, p. 206-207

The second phase was the major amphibious assaults to include seizing eastern LEYTE from TACLOBAN to DULAG, to open SAN JUANICO STRAIT and PANOAN STRAIT, and to secure LEYTE VALLEY to CARIGARA BAY. This phase began on 20 October 1944, when the U.S. Sixth Army with the X and XXIV Corps landed abreast on the east coast of LEYTE, while the 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division was landing unopposed on the southern tip of LEYTE and on the northern tip of PANOAN ISLAND thus gaining control of PANOAN STRAIT. (See Map B) (4)

The latter landing provided a base for motor torpedo boats and access to the MINDANAO SEA which was of vital importance in the historic Battle of LEYTE GULF which occurred 24-26 October 1944. (5)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

The second phase of the LEYTE OPERATION was completed by Sixth Army on 2 November 1944. In the XXIV Corps zone to the south, the 7th and 96th U.S. Infantry Divisions had advanced rapidly and secured the southern portion of LEYTE VALLEY to include DULAG-BARAUEN-DAGAMI-TANAUAN the air strip at DULAG and three airfields in the BURAUEN area. (See Map C) (6)

In the X Corps the 24th Infantry Division, minus the 21st Infantry Regiment, driving up LEYTE VALLEY, joined with the 1st U.S. Cavalry Division to take CARIGARA on D plus 12, thus securing the LEYTE VALLEY. Elements of the 1st Cavalry Division had secured the southwest portion of SEMAR ISLAND thus controlling SAN JUANICO STRAIT. (See Map C) (7)

(4) A-12, p. 14

(5) Statement by Capt. Blaney, 28 November 1944;  
Personal knowledge; A-10, p. 17

(6) A-5, p. 11

(7) A-5, p. 12

## GEOGRAPHY, WEATHER AND TERRAIN

LEYTE is the eighth largest PHILIPPINE ISLAND some 125 miles long and from 20 to 40 miles wide, centrally located in the Philippine group. The island is divided by exceedingly rough mountainous terrain, heavily wooded by tropical rain forest and is broken only by two major lowland areas. The LEYTE VALLEY extends from CARIGARA BAY on the north to TACLOBAN and ABUYOG on the east coast and the ORMAC VALLEY running from ORMAC BAY north toward LIMON. (8)

The Island of LEYTE receives considerable rainfall normally and especially during the monsoon season, or when the inter-tropical front passes the PHILIPPINES which practically coincided with the LEYTE OPERATION. In addition, the typhoons make up an entirely separate climatic factor but are formed in this same front of winds and pass directly through LEYTE ISLAND during the months of October, November and December. This weather condition was a risk, known and considered during the planning of the operation. (9)

The road from the vicinity of CARIGARA to PINAMOPOAN follows the bay and was built over very marshy ground. This road gave way due to the rains and heavy traffic and became an absolute bog. It had to be abandoned to all but emergency traffic while the engineers worked frantically to reconstruct it, however, this took over two months. In the meantime the only supply route was landing craft carrying supplies from the east coast of LEYTE through the SAN JUANICO STRAIT to the PINAMOPOAN area. The supplies from this point were all practically hand carried (using some Filipino carriers) to the forward troops. (10)

(8) A-17, p. 459

(9) A-17, p. 460

(10) A-18, p. 518

The terrain west of PINAMOPOAN rose abruptly into the mountains with the winding trail from PINAMOPOAN to LIMON, the only route over this rough terrain into the ORMAC VALLEY. BREAKNECK RIDGE is not one ridge but a series of ridges in the area where the trail crosses the highest ground. The series of ridges are broken into knobs, separated by deep rocky ravines and the entire area is heavily wooded or covered with kunai grass two to five feet high. (11) Major General Fredrick A. Irving said in regards to BREAKNECK RIDGE, "The terrain is the toughest I ever saw." (12)

Visibility was frequently limited from fifteen to twenty yards, due to the heavy rain, low clouds, and normally by the dense vegetation. (13)

#### THE GENERAL DISPOSITIONS OF THE ENEMY UNITS ON LEYTE

The Japanese strength on LEYTE when the operation began was estimated at 16,000 troops, mainly the 16th Japanese Division. Due to the lack of allied aerial strength on LEYTE, the Japanese had landed reinforcements almost as they chose during Phase II. It was later learned that the landings included elements of the 1st Japanese Division from LUZON, the 30th Japanese Division from MINDANAO, and the 102nd Japanese Division from CEBU, plus elements of the Jap 8th and 16th Divisions. (14) The entire reinforcements of some estimated 60,000 Japanese troops plus the island garrison came under the command of the Japanese 35th Army from LUZON. (15)

The Japanese 1st Division, considered one of the four best Nipponese outfits, upon landing at ORMAC were moved north toward CARIGARA BAY to attack through the defensive lines held by the

(11) A-12, p. 15

(12) A-2, p. 213

(13) Personal knowledge

(14) A-16, p. 42; A-10, p. 11-13, 20

(15) A-10, p. 7



Japanese 16th Division. (This was definitely brought out in captured Japanese maps and documents entitled "1st Japanese Division Plan for GRAND OFFENSIVE.") (See Map D)

The troops of the 1st Japanese Division were much larger than the Japanese previously encountered in NEW GUINEA. They had good morale, were highly trained, and intelligence conscious. The dead revealed little in the way of intelligence, as the troops carried no diaries, letters or maps. The enemy captured, which were few, gave little information as compared to previous operations. (16)

#### GENERAL DISPOSITION AND PLANS OF X CORPS

The third phase of the operation began on 3 November 1944 when X Corps advanced the 24th Infantry Division westward from CARIGARA minus the 21st Infantry Regiment. The 1st Cavalry Division was sent into the mountains between the two valleys to prevent the Japanese from entering LEYTE VALLEY from the mountains on the south of X Corps sector. (17) (See Map C)

The 21st Infantry Regiment was relieved from its position on PONAON ISLAND, in Sixth Army reserve, by elements of the 7th U.S. Infantry Division. The unit was shuttled by boat to TANAUAN on the east coast of LEYTE and by truck across LEYTE VALLEY to rejoin the Division. The first echelon of the move was composed of part of the 21st Infantry Regimental Headquarters and the 1st and 3rd Battalions, which landed on TANAUAN beach the morning of 4 November. The same day this echelon was moved inland with Regimental Headquarters and the 3rd Battalion assembled in the vicinity of COLASION, and the 1st Battalion assembling near

(16) Personal knowledge

(17) A-20, p. 218; A-5, p. 12

CAPOOCAN. The second echelon of the regiment followed by forty-eight hours. (18)

The 19th Infantry Regiment was defending on both flanks of the 24th Division area to include positions along CARIGARA BAY and were patrolling vigorously.

The 34th Infantry Regiment led the 24th Infantry Division advance west along CARIGARA BAY and was turning south from PINAMOPOAN toward LIMON when ordered to hold its present position. The position was supposedly the high ground south of PINAMOPOAN. (19) (See Map E)

On the morning of 5 November 1944, the 21st Infantry Regimental Commander accompanied by his Executive Officer, the 3rd Battalion Commanding Officer, Regimental S-2 and S-3, and the 3rd Battalion S-3 met in the 34th Infantry Regimental C.P., in the vicinity of PINAMOPOAN where the plans and orders for the 21st Infantry to relieve the 34th Infantry were drawn up.

The general plan was for the 3rd Battalion of the 21st Infantry to relieve the 3rd Battalion, the leading Battalion of the 34th Infantry, followed by the 1st Battalion of the 21st Infantry relieving the 2nd Battalion of the 34th Infantry. (20)

Reconnaissance was difficult due to the rugged terrain, deep mud and lack of maps or accurate sketches. The 3rd Battalion Commander of the 21st Infantry had a hasty look of the area and found the first surprise of the operation. The 3rd Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment was some 1000 yards short of the highest and most commanding ground of the ridge, as was understood in the

(18) Personal knowledge

(19) A-2, p. 18

(20) A-5, p. 17

earlier meeting. (21) The company commanders had no opportunity to make reconnaissances. (22)

Lieutenant Colonel Eric Ramee, commanding the 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry, decided to pass through the 34th Infantry positions and occupy the ridge. It was about 1200 hours when the Battalion Commander met his Battalion just south of PINAMOPOAN in march order as directed, Companies K, I, Hq., M, L, in that order. The Battalion moved on with plans for Company K to occupy the ridge on the high ground just north of the road, Company I to occupy the high ground just south of the road, and Company L was in reserve. (See Map E)

#### NARRATION

##### THE FIRST OCCUPATION OF THE RIDGE

Artillery was falling all over BREAKNECK RIDGE as Company L halted in a bend of the road some 500 yards short of the high ground, just west of point "C". (See Map E) Captain Edward M. Anglim, Commanding Company L, with his runner moved out to join the Battalion Commander, who was with Company K on O. P. Hill. A fire fight could be heard on the ridge and tension mounted as runners and wounded drifted through L Company's positions, making frantic remarks.

The time seemed to stand still as the suspense lingered, but word soon came for one platoon of Company L to bring all available litters forward to K Company's position. Another platoon was to collect all available mortar, machine gun ammunition and entrenching tools and bring it forward on M Company's vehicles.

(21) A-5, p. 18

(22) Personal knowledge

Company L, minus two platoons, was to defend with Headquarters Company 3rd Battalion in their present position, in vicinity of point "E". (23)

Company L observed the enemy between points N and O, but due to the state of confusion were not permitted to open fire. Contact with Company I was out and it was known that the 52nd Field Artillery had an observation party on this ridge. (24)

Although LEYTE had been held by the United States for some 40 years prior to 1942, there were no maps available with the companies and each Battalion had one radically inaccurate map of LEYTE ISLAND, approximately 1/250,000 scale. The only terrain sketch made from photo coverage was also highly inaccurate which made it impossible for units to report their location. (25)

It was soon realized that the enemy was holding much of the ground between the company positions. Although no attack was made, the enemy placed heavy fire into Company L and 3rd Battalion Headquarters position. (26)

The afternoon was almost gone when the Battalion Commander radioed that L Company's platoon with the two Company M vehicles were ambushed at point "B", losing both vehicles and the platoon had several casualties. He informed the Battalion Executive Officer, Major Lamar W. Little, that he and Captain Anglim were remaining with Company K and that one platoon of Company L was digging in with Company K to hold the position. (27)

(23) Personal knowledge

(24) A-5, p. 18

(25) A-10, p. 29

(26) A-5, p. 32

(27) Personal knowledge

During the night K Company's position on O. P. Hill was attacked three times and I Company's position on the left was also attacked. Company L, minus one platoon, with Battalion Headquarters Anti-tank section ambushed a Japanese patrol of approximately 30 men who were deliberately walking down the road near point "E" at about 0300. Throughout the night the entire area was under heavy mortar and artillery fire. (28)

#### THE SECOND DAY ON BREAKNECK RIDGE\*

At 0800 6 November, Company A, with L Company's weapons platoon in support made an attack up the road to fill the gap between I and K Companies. This attack was stopped short of the bridge, north of point N, 1st Lieutenant William C. Hughes, commanding Company A, was killed as the company suffered heavy casualties. Company A soon became disorganized and fell back which required L Company to cover their withdrawal. (29)

It was about noon when word was received from Lieutenant Colonel Ramee that their position, Company K reinforced, on O. P. Hill could not be held and they were withdrawing. Similar news came from Company I about the same time.

The first battalion, minus Company A, had been sent out on the left flank. The second battalion having just arrived from POANON ISLAND, was ordered to organize and defend, with the third battalion, the line held by Company L just forward of the 3rd Battalion C. P. near point "E". During the night enemy action

\* For Point references (See Map F); For Company movement (See Overlay)

(28) A-5, p. 18

(29) A-5, p. 19

was minor and the defensive positions were reorganized. (30)

#### THE THIRD DAY ON BREAKNECK RIDGE

During the morning of 7 November the 2nd Battalion moved out to attack the ridge astride the road. The terrain did not permit lateral contact between companies with Company E on the right of the road and F and G Companies on the left. (31)

It was about 1200 hours when Company L with a section of M Company's machine guns attached was ordered to attack and fill the gap existing between E and F Companies. The company commander had no opportunity to make a reconnaissance, there was no position from which the terrain could be observed and there were no maps or photos from which to make a study of the terrain. Company L moved out, in column, and had a wide encircling movement up the stream to the south where darkness found them occupying an intermediate objective, the ridge at point "C" where they dug in for the night. This was some three hundred yards behind Companies E and F. The terrain was such that a two hundred yard advance represented at least a five hundred yard movement on the ground. (32)

The night was a terrible ordeal in the hastily dug positions on the exposed ridge. The typhoon and heavy rains during the night made the ridge seem like a river. As morning came and the heavy mist rose over the high ground, a five-man Japanese patrol was within the position before being detected and killed.

#### THE FOURTH DAY ON BREAKNECK RIDGE

The men were cold and stiff as they fumbled in their water-filled foxholes for their equipment and it was 0830 hours before

(30) Personal knowledge

(31) A-5, p. 19

(32) A-5, p. 27

the company could collect itself to move on over the slippery rugged terrain. The movement was by column requiring human chains to lower and raise men and weapons in and out of the gulches. Resistance was minor and Company L came abreast of Company F about 1100 hours between "M" and "N", later known as "Hot Spot Knob," the highest point on the ridge.

The objective from this position was not clear other than the company was to contact Company E or retake O. P. Hill. Company L was exposed to accurate sniper fire as they descended the open slope for some forty yards where they again entered dense underbrush and thick kunai grass in the saddle. The company again had to close into two columns about twenty yards apart. Movement was slow as they picked their way through the entangled thicket in follow the leader fashion. Radio contact was soon lost as the company pushed blindly forward. After an advance of some six to eight hundred yards, in this unavoidable vulnerable formation the whole company came under heavy enemy fire from all directions. The prone position without lateral contact between columns did not lend itself to return fire without visibility. The machine guns and mortars returned the fire with all available ammunition with the weapons. The artillery forward observer could at best see his feet and without knowing his exact location was hesitant to call for fire. Although the enemy in some cases were only a few yards away, it was impossible to throw grenades in the dense underbrush. Captain Anglim was one of some thirty odd casualties and ordered the company to withdraw.

Company L remained calm and orderly during the withdrawal as Lieutenant Charles R. Whitney and T/Sgt. O. O. Youngblood

remained in position with one squad of each of their platoons while the company evacuated themselves, in earthworm fashion, assisting the wounded back to F Company's position. The only confusion, which was minor, was organizing carrying parties to carry the wounded back to the aid station which greatly depleted the strength of the position. These same carrying parties were the only means by which the Company received ammunition and rations which they brought forward on their return trip.

It was Company F in covering the withdrawal in the final stages that saved many casualties as the Japanese closed rapidly behind the withdrawing troops. Darkness found several men of L Company still in the saddle where they remained all night.

Both companies were tied in around "Hot Spot Knob" during the night and were able to hold off two enemy attacks with close artillery fires and using all available grenades which did not disclose positions. The machine guns that opened fire during the first attack were the main objectives of the enemy during the second attack during that night.

#### THE FIFTH DAY ON BREAKNECK RIDGE

When morning came Company L found themselves with several wounded to be evacuated and in need of more ammunition. With the company strength less than one hundred it greatly weakened the position to send litter bearers back with casualties, and it was several hours before they returned with ammunition.

The south side of the position was receiving intermittent artillery fire which was very common throughout the operation. This made it difficult to spot and direct counterbattery fire. From the north side of the knob Company L observed about thirty



Japs laying mines on the south crest of the road over the ridge at point "O". Artillery fire was called and the machine guns and mortars were having a field day when a radio message was received that Company L was to return to point "C".

Company F extended its position and reorganized the ground as L Company moved off down the ridge to the northeast about five hundred yards. The Company Commander reported to the Battalion Commander in the vicinity of point "D" to receive the attack order. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions were attacking abreast to take the ridge and forward slopes extending south toward LIMON. Company L was an interior company and was to move roughly parallel to the road and take the ridge just north of point "N". The machine guns from H and M Companies sprayed the area in a 30 minute preparation and as the artillery opened up on the ridge, the attack moved off at 0930. Movement as usual was difficult over the rugged terrain and enemy rifle and mortar fire slowed the advance. (33)

The artillery forward observers were constantly calling for fires close in which aided the advance. At 1300 hours Company L, abreast of Company K on the right and Company G on the left, reached the ridge but the attack was meeting stiffer resistance from the enemy reverse slope positions. (34)

The attack was practically stopped when the Air Corps made their surprise air drop of all types of supplies which were intended for the 2nd Battalion, 34th Infantry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas E. Clifford, which was some five to eight miles behind the enemy lines. The ammunition, particularly

(33) A-5, p. 25

(34) A-5, p. 25

mortar and machine gun, in the company was getting low and the air drop came none too soon and was immediately put to use. The air drop seemed to stop the enemy fire and the troops on the entire front were able to move and by 1500 hours the mission was accomplished. The regiment held the military crest to the south of BREAKNECK RIDGE for the first time. (35)

Company L was only in their position a short time when C Company relieved them on their position and L Company returned to the vicinity of the 3rd Battalion and Regimental C.P.'s in the vicinity of point "D". It was a welcome relief for the company to be in reserve but the heavy rains during the night of 9-10 November brought more discomfort and mud.

#### THE SIXTH DAY ON BREAKNECK RIDGE

The brief period Company L was in reserve was ended with orders attaching the company to the 2nd Battalion to attack at 0900 hours and take the high ground at point "H". Once again the movement was slow and treacherous due to the rains during the night. The company had to move mostly in column and employing the human chains to ascend abrupt slippery sides of the gulches. The company could not deploy to any extent beyond platoon column and it was with the supporting fires of G and F Company, close artillery and mortar support that made it possible for Company L to take the high ground by 1120 hours. This supposedly cleared and secured the entire ridge. (36)

Movement within this position was limited due to enemy fire on the exposed position. The wounded caused a drain on the company strength, which was about eighty men, in evacuation.

(35) Personal knowledge

(36) A-5, p. 26

The resupply of ammunition more than offset the loss in strength when the parties returned with all they could carry. During the afternoon L Company's position was under direct heavy artillery fire from short range. (37)

The position was difficult to organize under fire and with little cover. The company braced itself for what was feared might come that night. The expected didn't come and the only enemy activity were patrols which were driven off with hand grenades.

#### THE SEVENTH DAY ON BREAKNECK RIDGE

On the morning of 11 November, Company L still attached to the 2nd Battalion was ordered to attack to the east and clear the enemy resistance between its position and G Company which had moved in on the high ground to the east at point "F". Due to the terrain the company again could not maneuver but had to make a frontal attack which was stopped by heavy fire from the dense woods about 150 yards from their position. The Company Commander reported the situation to the Battalion Commander and the attack would have failed if F Company had not been committed on L Company's right flank. It was only by the gallant leadership of Captain Charles R. Jameson that this resistance including five Japanese machine guns was knocked out. (38)

It was late in the afternoon when this position was mopped up and the ground organized. Company F was ordered to return to the 2nd Battalion C. P. area and E and L Companies took positions on mutually supporting ground.

(37) A-5, p. 27

(38) A-5, p. 29 and Capt. Jameson's Citation p. 22-23

The night brought one enemy attack in force against L Company's position which lasted for about one hour. This attack was repulsed mainly by close in artillery fire and with hand grenades. The machine guns and automatic rifles fired only when the enemy came in close, silhouetting them against the skyline. The noise made by the enemy aided in calling for artillery fire.

#### THE EIGHTH DAY ON BREAKNECK RIDGE

On the morning of 12 November it was found that the enemy had moved into positions in vicinity of point "L" and were also on the east flank of Company L. The positions were quickly taken under fire by the artillery forward observer and by the company mortars. While these fires were falling the second platoon of L Company moved out under supporting fires from the rest of the company and cleared the enemy from these positions.

The company was beginning to feel a little more secure in their position with less direct fire coming into the position which allowed for more freedom of movement. The men were digging more elaborate positions and nibbling on K rations when a radio message brought word that Company F and the 2nd Battalion C. P. was under attack at point "R". Company L was alerted for a move and E and G Companies were ordered to reorganize and cover the ground held by Company L. At 1620 hours, L Company was ordered to relieve F Company and set up a perimeter defense around the 2nd Battalion C. P. at point "R". The company moved out rapidly in column formation and immediately set up their defense upon reaching the 2nd Battalion C. P. Darkness found L Company still improving the positions in their defensive perimeter. The night was quiet except for a few infiltrating enemy that were killed on the edges of the perimeter. (39)

(39) A-5, p. 30

## THE NINTH DAY ON BREAKNECK RIDGE

Company L was very much relaxed to find themselves in a rear position the next morning. It was good for the morale of the company to receive their first hot coffee in five days with the welcome C rations which arrived about 0830 hours.

The only activity during the day was conducted by the security patrols and the relief of the men on the observation posts throughout the area.

It was during the night that the enemy action again mounted. The Japs made several sustained counterattacks on L Company's position the last and most desperate came about 0400 hours. During this last attack the enemy penetrated the perimeter and resulting in hand to hand combat. The wounded were cared for within the position by the 2nd Battalion Surgeon, Captain Erner Jones, who went through the position from fox hole to fox hole during darkness.

## THE TENTH DAY ON BREAKNECK RIDGE

The next morning was spent reorganizing the perimeter, evacuating the wounded. The company for the first time received some cleaning and preserving materials which were badly needed.

The security patrols were active throughout the area without enemy contact. Rumors were numerous in regards to expected relief and the spirit of the troops perked up. The rest of the day and night were exceptionally quiet. When morning came the rumors were confirmed and the most welcome relief arrived about noon 16 November as the 128th Infantry Regiment of the 32nd Infantry Division took over our positions.

To sum up the results of L Company's action in this meeting engagement: The entire period was spent in confusion. The

company actually never had time to think or try to study out just what was happening.

The 24th Division Commander directed the 21st Infantry Regiment: "The initiative will be maintained at all cost." The regiment carried out this mission against great odds. The enemy strength was never accurately estimated in the 24th Division sector, especially the enemy forces opposing the 21st Infantry. After action reports, however, show that the Regiment was attacking an enemy force of twice its strength, while the enemy was also attacking over the same terrain.

The area of BREAKNECK RIDGE was the key to the enemy defensive system of ORMAC VALLEY and the main avenue of approach for the enemy's counteraction. It is easy to note that the enemy began their activities late in the afternoon about 1600 hours and remained active until dawn. In contrast our action offensively was during the remaining period of each day.

The 21st Infantry from 5 November to 16 November advanced some 2000 yards over a series of some six ridges, each being occupied by both forces several times.

Major General Fredrick A. Irving had this to say in regards to the terrain on BREAKNECK RIDGE, "The terrain is the toughest I ever saw."

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

##### 1. MAPS AND SKETCHES

The most important single factor hindering the operation on BREAKNECK RIDGE resulted from the lack of maps and the inaccuracy of the sketches. The terrain limited observation to the next ridge at best. It was impossible to determine the terrain characteristics beyond the next hill mass and most frequently it was

impossible to observe into the immediate draw to the front.

The only available map, down to battalion level, was approximately 1/250,000 and was highly inaccurate particularly in the area around BREAKNECK RIDGE. The sketches, made from cloud covered photos, failed to show terrain features and the roads and trails were very misleading.

The Company could not report its position except by compass and distance. The company was sent on missions which were impossible to accomplish with the time prescribed due to the lack of knowledge of the terrain.

Battalion and Company Commanders found it impossible to refer to the sketches in issuing orders without causing confusion or giving faulty information.

## 2. RECONNAISSANCE

In studying this operation, it is my opinion that time saved by not allowing Company Commanders to make reconnaissance resulted in much delay in troop movement and reaching the objectives. Had the company commander, on the second day, known the terrain he could have led his company on a shorter route and completed that day's mission prior to darkness.

In a series of meeting engagements as Company L experienced in this operation, it is believed that the company would have been more effectively used had the Company Commander and Platoon Leaders been permitted to make their reconnaissance. The knowledge of the terrain was nil, and without maps or sketches the officers were blindly leading their units.

As the operation advanced and the company had physically moved over the greater portion of the ground, time was saved in troop movement and in accomplishing missions.

### 3. SUPPLY AND EVACUATION

The difficulties in evacuation were extremely costly to the strength of the company in holding positions. A minimum of two men and generally three or four were required to carry each wounded soldier to the rear over this terrain. It required several hours to make the trip and the situation of organizing terrain to repel counterattacks was in most cases serious until the carrying parties returned.

Parties from the rear could not be sent forward in most cases because they did not know the exact location of the forward companies.

In evacuation the parties carrying the wounded after leaving the aid station were always instructed to pick up ammunition on their return trip. This was the main method of resupply. If time permitted and the personnel were available from service troops, these parties were supplemented generally by Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon people to carry the supplies forward. This was found to be the best method because of the laborous trip to be made with the heavy loads and additional personnel permitted additional security during the trip.

### 4. CONDUCT OF PERIMETER DEFENSE AT NIGHT

It was found that in a perimeter defense at night the firing of weapons, particularly automatic weapons, disclosed the position. The enemy were particularly interested in spotting automatic and crew served weapons which they would attack separately.

In the conduct of the defense it was found that at night it was best to first call for artillery and heavy mortar concentrations which were frequently brought within fifty yards of the



position. If some of the enemy came within range of hand grenades they were found extremely effective and did not disclose the exact location of a position.

Although driven off by heavy fires the enemy was determined and would make successive attacks upon a position regardless of casualties.

#### 5. TACTICAL FORMATIONS

The terrain on BREAKNECK RIDGE was such that the tactical formations employed by a company were limited. In crossing much of the ridge required assistance of each other in descending and climbing in and out of the ravines. A few variations of the column formations were the typical ones but these were not in close column except when necessary and movement was never in a straight line. It was necessary to maintain control in this type terrain particularly in an attack movement.

It was found that the company could move in close to the objective and disperse in a deployed formation for the assault while the preparatory fires were being delivered. The forward observers were with the companies and lifted the fires as late as possible just prior to the assault. The men in the company came to feel a sense of security from our artillery after a few days experience.

#### 6. WEATHER AND TERRAIN

The operation was conducted under unfavorable weather conditions and over very difficult terrain. As was mentioned under geography, weather and terrain, higher headquarters knew of the probable weather conditions but took the risk of bad weather in favor of other factors.

The weather was probably the main factor that slowed the progress of the operation. This was because movement was difficult for individuals and the whole operation was hampered by the logistical problem that resulted.

As for the terrain it was a new experience for the outfit because of lack of lateral contact. This was due more to the irregularity of the terrain than by the dense vegetation. In this meeting engagement terrain was probably the largest single problem on the regimental level, however this terrain would have been an obstacle in any type operation. The actual ground distance was so increased that plans were normally off schedule which was unavoidable.

#### 7. THE WITHDRAWAL

In an operation in a meeting engagement of this type withdrawals should be expected. It is common for some units to be committed against great odds to stop an enemy threat. If the enemy action is such that the mission cannot be accomplished it is better to save the unit for later use than to lose it. Our tactical doctrine does not take into consideration that commanders, in cases of emergency, are not all of the same caliber in making an estimate of the situation.

When Company L found its forward movement stopped and their vulnerable formation and position untenable, the only choice of action was a withdrawal. There was no time to wait for further developments or darkness in this company ambush. The withdrawal was only successful due to company control and the leadership demonstrated by both the officers and the non-commissioned officers.

## LESSONS

1. A unit operating in rugged terrain must have maps, aerial photos or sketches that are legible and fairly accurate to assist in the accomplishment of their mission.
2. Reconnaissance by small unit commanders prior to moving the troops is necessary to permit the unit to use the terrain in their favor.
3. To sustain a unit in action in mountainous terrain, it is necessary to improvise and special measures must be taken to insure adequate evacuation and to meet the resupply problem.
4. A perimeter defense against a fanatical enemy, particularly at night, requires excellent fire control discipline and individual action.
5. In some types of terrain tactical formations are limited to column formation to insure control.
6. Weather and terrain are uncontrollable factors during combat but should not be underestimated in a commander's estimate.
7. Unit control at all times is invaluable but more evident in the accomplishment of an orderly withdrawal.